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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION ACTIVIST COMMENTS ON PRESIDENTIAL RACE

REF: ACCRA 2096

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sue K. Brown for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. SUMMARY/COMMENT: National Democratic Party (NDC) activist Fiji Kwetey told PolChief during a October 5 meeting that his party would likely select NDC parliamentary foreign affairs spokesman John Mahama as its Vice Presidential candidate. He indicated that NDC insiders view former Trade Minister Alan Kyerematen as the favorite among New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidates for President, but said Kyerematen's Ashanti ethnic background would work against him in the general election and would be exploited by the NDC. Finally, Kwetey noted that a resurgent Convention People's Party (CPP) may be an important factor in the election. Kwetey's remarks regarding John Mahama are consistent with other sources who view the NDC's foreign affairs spokesman as the front-runner for the NDC Vice Presidential slot. However, Kwetey's comments also suggest that Ghana's main opposition party is currently watching carefully and strategizing as the ruling NPP agonizes over choosing a successor to President Kufuor as party leader. END SUMMARY/COMMENT.

¶2. (C) PolChief spoke October 5 with opposition National Democratic Party (NDC) activist and advisor to former President Jerry Rawlings, Fiji Kwetey. Kwetey said that NDC parliamentary foreign affairs spokesman John Mahama will likely be the party's choice for Vice Presidential candidate on the ticket with John Atta Mills (reftel). Kwetey also noted that many in the NDC believe Mahama is the best choice as a young, charismatic and "moderate" member of the party. In addition, Mahama is a Northerner from the Gonja ethnic group, which will help cement NDC support in a traditional stronghold and add important diversity to the NDC ticket.

¶3. (C) Kwetey commented that NDC insiders view former Trade Minister Alan Kyerematen as the likely New Patriotic Party (NPP) choice for presidential candidate, although both Vice President Aliu Mahama and Nana Akufo-Addo are also strong candidates. Among the three, said Kwetey, the NDC prefers Kyerematen as an opponent. Kyerematen is a member of the Ashanti ethnic group - the same group as President Kufuor - and Kwetey said many Ghanaians will resent it if the NPP chooses a second consecutive candidate from the Ashanti ethnic group. In addition, Kwetey said some Ghanaians, particularly Northerners and Muslims, will feel that Vice President Mahama deserves the nomination and is being treated disrespectfully by his party after serving loyally as Kufuor's deputy. Kwetey said the NDC would exploit these negative sentiments to generate support for its own candidate.

¶4. (C) Concerning Vice President Mahama's Muslim faith, Kwetey said religion is an important factor in Ghanaian politics and that many Christian Ghanaians would never vote for a Muslim presidential candidate. While most Ghanaians would not admit this openly, Kwetey said a Muslim could not be elected President of Ghana.

¶5. (C) Among the NPP candidates, Kwetey said NDC insiders view former Foreign Minister Nana Akufo-Addo as the most formidable potential opponent in the general election. He noted that Akufo-Addo is well-funded, popular, charismatic, and has great appeal to younger voters. In addition, Akufo-Addo comes from the Akyem ethnic group in the Eastern Region, meaning that he lacks the ethnic baggage that Kyerematen carries as an Ashanti.

¶6. (C) Kwetey also indicated that his party sees increasing disenchantment among Ghanaian voters toward the ruling party. He noted that in the Ashanti region, an NPP stronghold, there is growing frustration with the central government. While the NDC has not typically polled well in that region, gaining 18% of the vote in 2000 and 22% in 2004, the NDC has set a target of 30% in Ashanti for the 2008 election.

¶7. (C) Finally, Kwetey conceded that the Convention People's Party (CPP) may have a stronger than usual showing in 2008 and that this could have a significant effect on the election results (NOTE: This is due to the closeness of the 2004 and 2000 elections, and the expectation that 2008 will be close as well. END NOTE). Among the CPP candidates, Kwetey dismissed the chances of pathologist Paakwasi Nduom, noting that many in the CPP view Nduom as a "traitor" for having served as a minister in Kufuor's government. However, Kwetey said Dr. Ageyman Badu Akorsa would be a more formidable candidate and raise the fortunes of the CPP. Nevertheless, Kwetey stressed that the NDC had largely taken over the CPP's role as Ghana's "Nkrumaist" political party, and that there has been weak support for the CPP in recent elections.
BROWN